SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

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SENATE DEMOCRATS INTRODUCE BILLS TO PROTECT FAMILY FARMS, RURAL COMMUNITIES

Muskegon, Saginaw, Monroe, and St. Joseph areas most impacted by corporate animal factories

LANSING—Addressing one of the greatest threats to Michigan family farms, rural life, drinking water, and air quality, Senate Democrats, led by Sen. Liz Brater (D-Ann Arbor), ranking Democrat on the Senate Agriculture, Forestry, & Tourism Committee, along with Rep. Frank Accavitti (D-Eastpointe), today introduced legislation that would provide adequate oversight for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), also known as factory farms. Every year, these corporate animal factories put smaller family farms and rural communities at risk by generating massive amounts of pollution, contaminating Michigan's air and water with animal waste and toxic byproducts.

"These operations are corporate animal factories, not farms," said Sen. Brater. "Michigan's family farmers are calling on us to help level the playing field and help protect the land and water they count on for their livelihood. Our legislation does just that."

Democrats referred to their package as AG SAFE, Adequate Guidelines for Safer Animal Factory Emissions. The Senate legislation would:

- Strengthen rules surrounding manure application to ensure roads, water wells, soil, and surface water used by other farmers and residents are protected;
- Increase penalties for manure spills and irresponsible waste disposal to ensure family farms and other rural neighbors can continue to live off the land;
- Increase local authority and scrutiny over factory farm site selection and impact.

"Farmers consider themselves to be good stewards of land and water," said Marilyn Momber, President, Michigan Farmers Union. "We depend on Michigan's water and soil quality standards for a good living, and we need laws that remove special treatment of corporate animal factories and treat them like the industrial polluters they are."

"Companies who impede a farmer or rural resident's ability to work and live where they have for decades must be held accountable for their actions," said Sen. Burton Leland (D-Detroit). "The only way to make them pay attention is to make them pay for the damages they inflict."

Corporate farms create a net loss of employment because they drive local farmers and the merchants that service them out of business. A study by Iowa State University found that family farms create 23% more local revenue per production unit than do corporate farms. Additionally, air and water quality issues have a substantial effect on property values. In some instances, the noxious odors emitted by hog producers have caused property devaluation surpassing 50% for neighbors within a 2-mile radius of the facility. In one case, the Michigan Tax Tribunal determined that a property lost 70% of its value due to a neighboring corporate animal factory.

"Setting up a corporate animal factory next to a family homestead is like building a multi-million dollar house and then pouring your sewage in the neighbor's ditch," said Rep. Accavitti. "But the multi-million dollar homes of factory farm executives are seldom near the facilities themselves, and the large companies that run the operations contract equipment and services. Host communities don't even get compensated for the stench they face daily."

Unmanaged livestock production is one of the biggest threats to community health in rural areas, yet corporate factory farms are not subject to the Clean Water Act, the federal rules and regulations to which all other factories must adhere. The clay-lined lagoons that store manure at corporate farms can be expected to leak up to several thousand gallons per acre per day, contaminating drinking water, spreading disease, and affecting air quality for miles.

"Corporate animal factories are wreaking havoc on Michigan's rural communities," said Anne Woiwode, Executive Director, Michigan Sierra Club. "The safety and quality of our food, our drinking water, and our way of life are all at stake."

Residents living near corporate farms experience increased rates of bronchitis, depression, headaches, diarrhea, shortness of breath, and an array of other ailments. Additionally, birth defects and miscarriages in communities surrounding factory farms have been linked to high levels of nitrates and other chemicals that are produced when the excessive amounts of chlorine required to "clean" contaminated drinking water mix with organic matter, like fertilizer, in surface water.

"As we work to strengthen and diversify our local and state economies, we need to level the playing field so that small farmers can compete," said Sen. Mark Schauer (D-Battle Creek). "An indication of our competitiveness and quality of life is how we care for and protect our environment. If we want to bring jobs to Michigan, we need to make sure it's a place people want to live."

Waste produced by corporate factory farms contains antibiotic-resistant bacteria, hormone-laced animal carcass remnants, and chemical byproducts. Each Michigan corporate animal factory produces about the same amount of urine and feces as 16,000 humans over any given time period. The manure from these facilities is spread in far-greater amounts than crops can use or the soil can absorb. With every rain, unabsorbed manure and other waste flows into near-by lakes, rivers, and streams.

"Corporate animal factories aren't just a problem for the communities where they exist. They affect the water supply, food quality, and recreation areas of all Michigan residents," said Sen. Mickey Switalski (D-Roseville). "We need to do everything we can to give Michigan residents a guarantee that they can depend on safe and clean water, whether they're drinking a glass of tap water, swimming in a lake, or watering crops."

AG SAFE is supported by Farms without Harm, Michigan Farmers Union, Sierra Club, and Michigan Environmental Council.

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